

THE GENESIS OF MACAULAY'S HISTORY

n

sought to accomplish ; for he had learned by long experience that this was as much as he could do at his best ; and except when at his best, he never would work at all. ' I had no heart to write/ he says in his journal of March 6, 1851. ' I am too self-indulgent in this matter, it may be ; and yet I attribute much of the success which I have had to my habit of writing only when I am in the humour, and of stopping as soon as the thoughts and words cease to flow fast. There are therefore few lees in my wine. It is all the cream of the bottle.'¹

I wrote the arrival of the news of the Boyne at White-hall. I go on slowly, but, I think, pretty well. There are not many weeks in which I do not write enough to fill seven or eight printed pages. The rule of never going on when the vein does not flow readily would not do for all men, or for all kinds of work. But I, who am not tied to time, who do not write for money, and who aim at interesting and pleasing readers whom ordinary histories repel, can hardly do better. How can a man expect that others will be amused by reading what he finds it dull to compose ?²

When the second and revised version was written out, there was still the final ' polishing and retouching to be done'. An 'immense labour', he rightly calls it. He made it immense because he was never satisfied unless every sentence was perfectly clear.

Worked some hours and got on tolerably. No doubt what I am writing will require much

correction ; but in
 the main, I think, it will do. How little the
 all-important
 art of making meaning pellucid is studied
 now ! Hardly
 any popular writer, except myself, thinks of
 it. Many
 seem to aim at being obscure. Indeed, they
 may be right
 enough in one sense ; for many readers give
 credit for
 profundity to whatever is obscure, and call all
 that is per-
 spicuous shallow. But coraggio ! and think of
 A.D. 2850.³

¹ Ibid. pp. 225-6.
 pp. 275-6.

² Journal, Mar. n, 1850. Ibid.

³ Journal, Jan. 12, 1850. Ibid. p. 272.